

2018 MTFP Consultation Feedback

Overview

Public consultation on the 2018 MTFP opened on 13 December 2017 and closed on 2 February 2018. Residents and stakeholders were invited to respond to the proposals via an online survey, with additional feedback sought via social media and the community survey.

The 2018 MTFP proposals, in short, can be summarised as:

1. Focussing additional resources, where possible, on the following five themes:
 - a. Community Safety
 - b. Maintaining an Attractive Street Scene Environment
 - c. Maintaining a Vibrant Town Centre
 - d. Developing an Attractive Visitor Economy
 - e. Neighbourhood Renewal
2. Increasing Council Tax by 2.99% and the adult social care precept by 3%

Respondents were asked to rank the five themes by order of importance, and invited to give comments on all proposals.

Summary of Feedback

383 respondent completed the 2018-2022 MTFP consultation survey and 182 comments were received in response to dedicated Facebook posts on the council's page.

The weighted average of survey respondents' rankings of the 5 proposed themes gives the following order, from most popular to least:

1. Community Safety
2. Street Scene
3. Town Centre
4. Neighbourhood Renewal
5. Visitor Economy

Analysis of written comments shows that survey respondents were generally supportive of all five themes – where comments indicated approval or disapproval of a theme, the proportion indicating approval was 84% or above across all themes.

Regarding the proposal to increase council tax and the Adult Social Care (ASC) Precept, just under half of respondents commented on this proposal and, of those, respondents were fairly evenly split between those in favour of the proposal and those against. The amendment on the 10th January to propose increasing council tax by a further 1% appears to have had little effect on how respondents felt about this proposal, with responses received after this change actually more likely to be favourable.

Overall, 75 of the 383 survey respondents (20%) mentioned the library in their response. All of these responses requested that the Central Library remain in its current location.

Analysis of responses by protected characteristic shows:

- Females were slightly more likely than males to prioritise Community Safety and Neighbourhood Renewal
- Over 60s were less likely to prioritise Neighbourhood Renewal, and over 75s were slightly more likely to prioritise Community Safety
- Respondents identifying as 'White - English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern / Irish' were more likely to prioritise the Town Centre and less likely to prioritise any of the remaining themes
- Respondents who reported having a disability were more likely to identify the Visitor Economy and, particularly, Community Safety as funding priorities.

Feedback

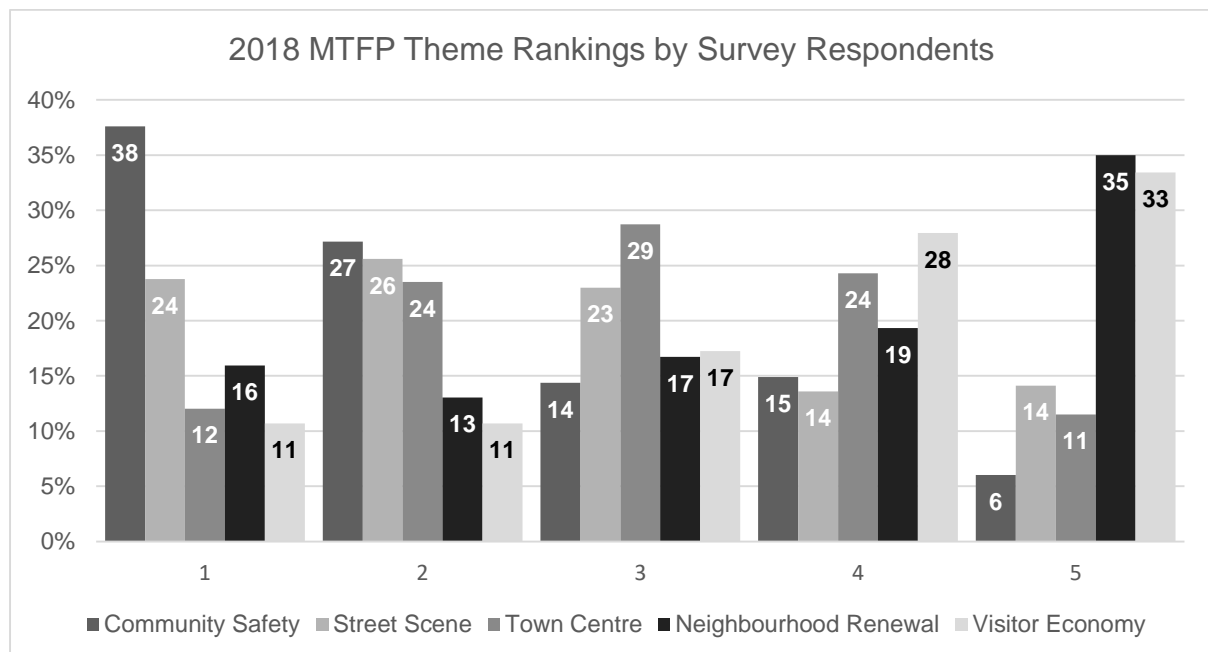
2018-2022 MTFP Survey

There were 383 responses to the 2018-2022 MTFP survey.

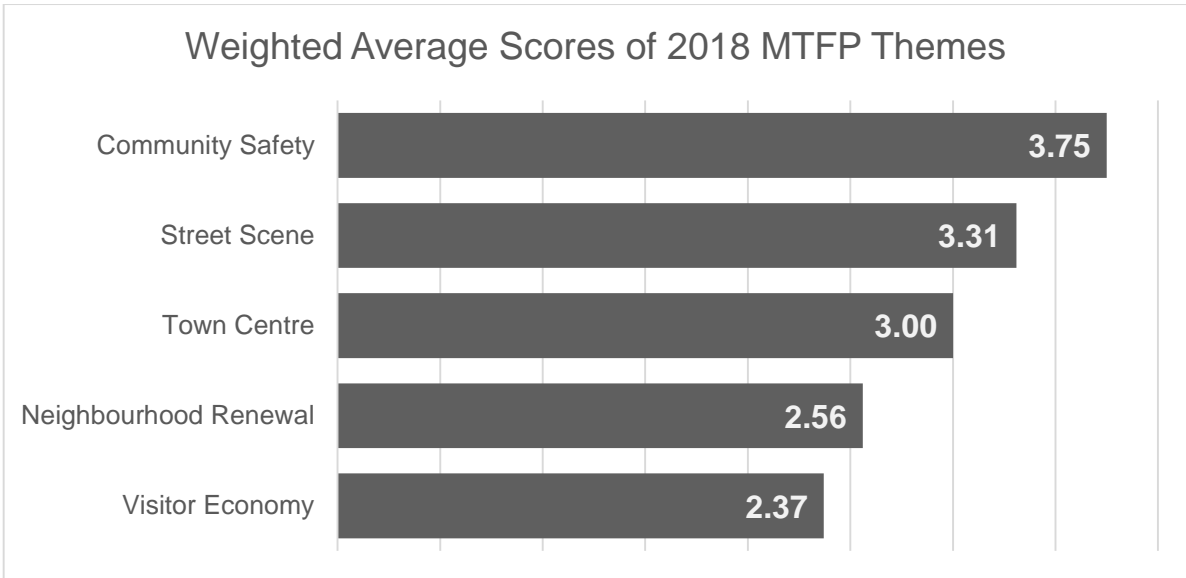
Proposed Themes

Rankings

100% of respondents ranked the proposed 5 themes, according to their views on their order of importance. The below graph shows the percentage of respondents who ranked each theme as 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th.



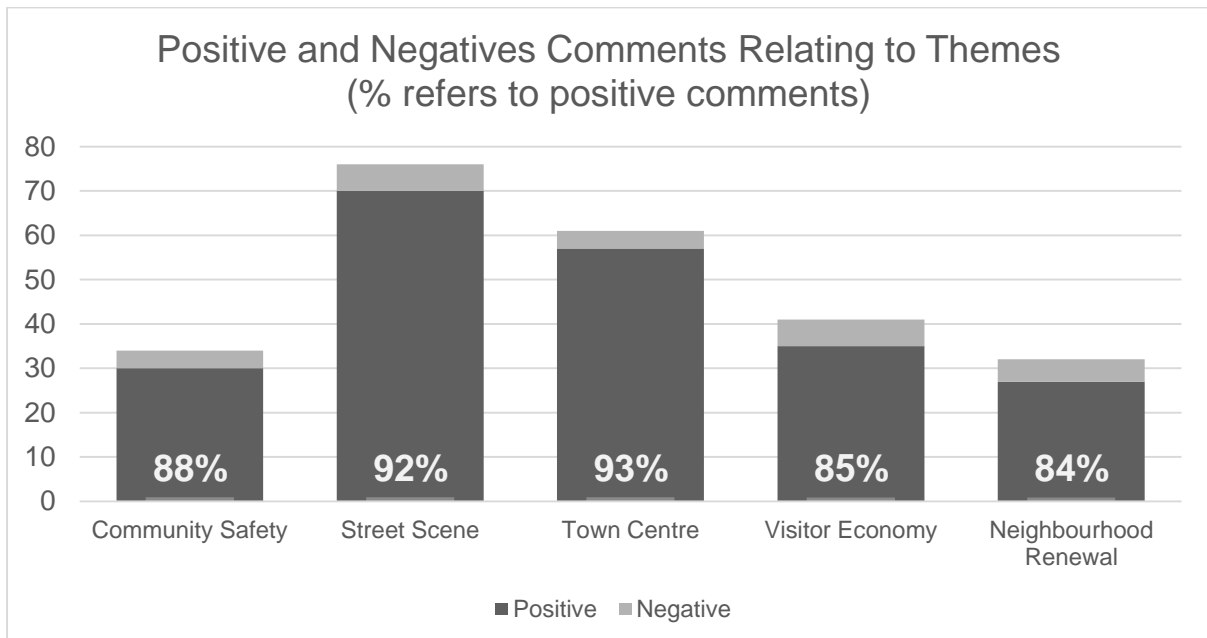
Combining these figures gives a weighted average, and shows which themes were deemed, overall, to be most important by respondents.



According to survey responses, then, Community Safety was considered to be the most important proposed theme followed, respectively, by Street Scene, the Town Centre, Neighbourhood Renewal and the Visitor Economy.

Comments

Across all three of open-ended questions in the survey, 155 comments related to one or more of the proposed themes. The graph below shows the number of comments received where the respondent gave a clear indication of whether they agreed or disagreed with one or more of the proposed themes, and which themes elicited the most comments.

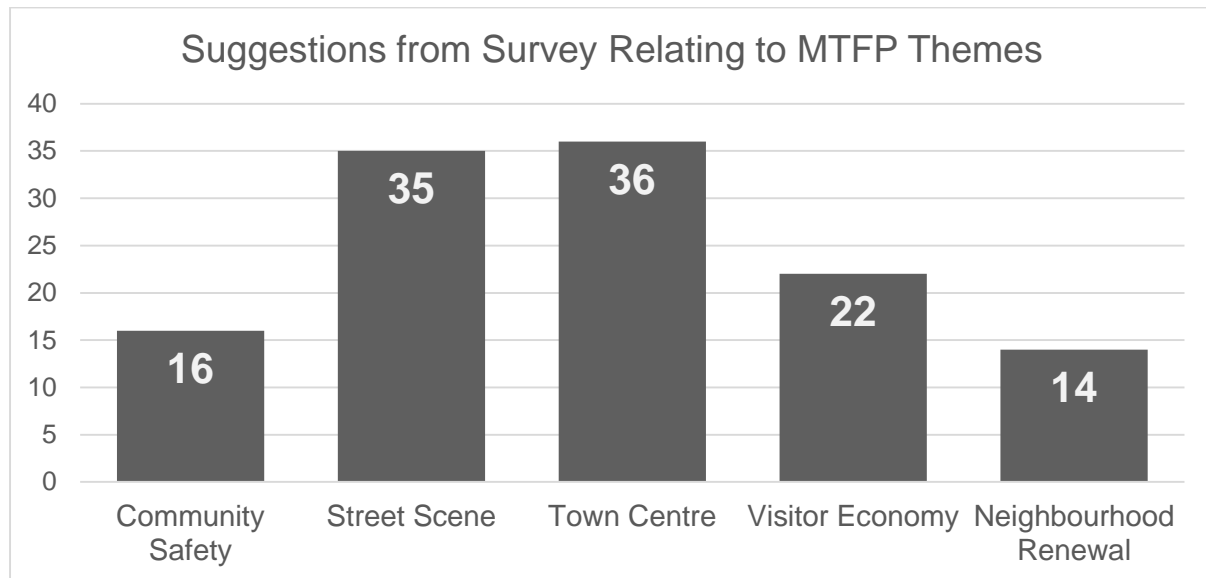


Street Scene received the most number of comments overall. The proportion of comments which indicated agreement that a theme should be a funding priority was

very high for all themes (84%-93%), indicating broad support amongst respondents for all five themes.

Suggestions

Many comments included suggestions of what specific issues should be prioritised within the five themes or ideas for what spending should be spent on.



Work is being undertaken to combine these suggestions with those received on the Facebook page and other feedback and, subject to agreement of the 2018-2022 MTFP Proposals, these suggestions will be passed onto Members and officers to consider.

Requests for Additional Themes

71 comments suggested additional issues that should be considered for priority funding, specifically:

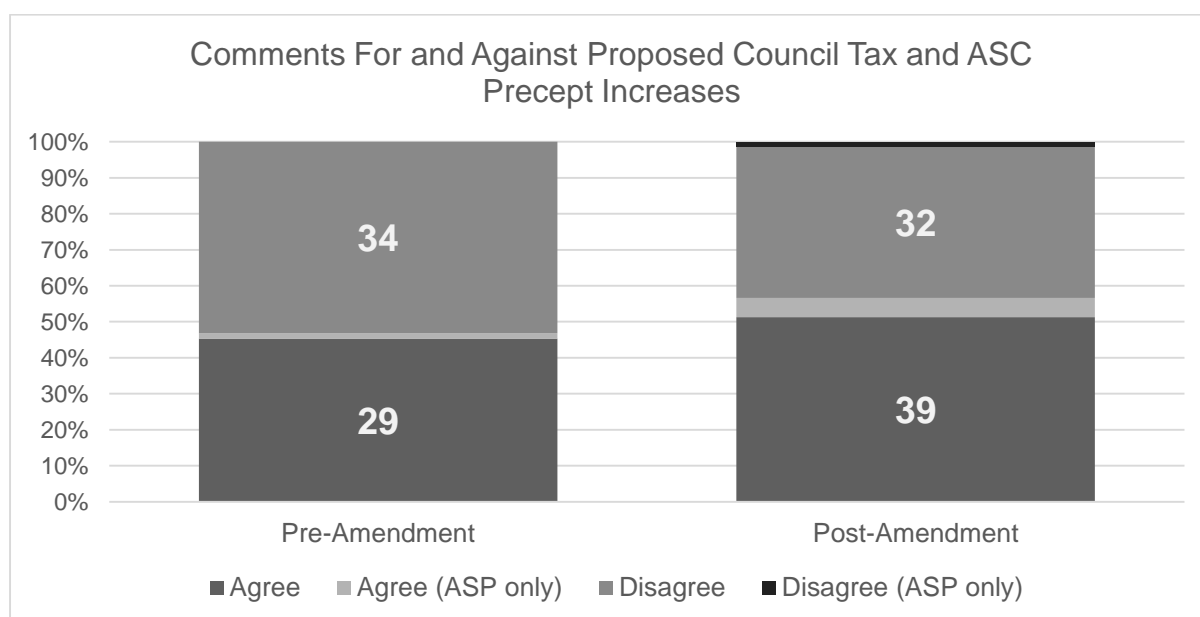
- Retaining the library at Crown Street (43)
- Economic growth/regeneration (3)
- Promoting the town (2)
- Roads (2)
- Increasing staff wages (2)
- Antisocial parking (2)
- Cleaning up the river
- Frontline services
- Gritting
- Homelessness and begging
- Free parking for short periods
- Improving partnership working
- Cyclists on footpaths
- Speeding
- Preventative healthcare
- Holiday Hunger initiatives
- Public Health
- Wildflower meadows
- Supporting rural communities
- Accessible transport for disabled residents.

Proposed Increases to Council Tax and the Adult Social Care (ASC) Precept Comments

Respondents were invited to comment on the council's proposal to increase council tax by 2.99% and ASC precept by 3%. **Nb. This proposal was updated midway**

through the consultation following the announcement by Central Government in the Local Government Finance Settlement that local authorities can raise council tax by an additional 1% to 2.99% before requiring a referendum. Following a Cabinet decision on the 9th January to increase the proposed increase, the consultation was extended to February 2nd and the analysis below has been separated to clearly show feedback received prior to and following this change.

181 survey respondents (47% of total) commented on this proposal: 82 before the change to raise the proposed council tax increase by 1% and 99 following the amendment. The graph below focuses on those comments where respondents clearly indicated whether they agreed or not with the proposal.



Overall, respondents were fairly evenly divided between those for and against the proposal, with respondents commenting after the amendment slightly more likely to agree with this proposal than those who commented prior.

Comments Agreeing with the Proposal to Increase Council Tax and the ASC Precept

29 respondents who completed the survey prior to January 10th and 39 respondents who completed it subsequent to January 10th agreed with the proposal to increase council tax and the ASC precept. Of these:

- 29 commented that the additional money should be spent well
- 7 raised concerns about residents' ability to pay
- 1 suggested the council should do more to raise awareness about why increases are needed
- 1 requested the increases be used to keep the central library at Crown Street

6 respondents agreed with the proposal to increase the ASC precept, but not with the proposal to increase council tax. Of these:

- 1 suggested that income from new housing should be used instead of increases in council tax
- 1 wanted the increases used to reimburse care allowances
- 2, very similar, respondents criticised council spending on the Civic Theatre
- 1 wanted the council to consider cutting senior managers' pay

Comments Disagreeing with the Proposal to Increase Council Tax and the ASC Precept

Overall, 66 respondents disagreed with the proposal. Of these:

- 19 suggested the council look elsewhere to cut costs or increase income
- 23 highlighted a concern about residents' ability to pay, with 1 suggesting that this increase could end up increasing demand for adult social care
- 3 objected to paying more for council services that they perceive as deteriorating
- 4 felt that the proposed increases seem high
- 1 requested more information
- 6 do not feel they see any benefit from increased council tax and ASC precept
- 3 criticised current spending by the council

1 respondent disagreed with the proposed increase in the ASC precept, but not council tax. This respondent, however, seemed to have confused this proposal for an increase in financial contributions for adult social care users.

Other Comments Relating to the Proposal to Increase Council Tax and the ASC Precept

39 respondents did not clearly agree or disagree with this proposal. Of these:

- 16 commented that the additional income should be spent well
- 15 suggested the council look elsewhere to cut costs or increase income
- 6 criticised current spending by the council
- 3 were concerned about residents' ability to pay
- 3 requested further information
- 2 felt that the proposed increases seem high
- 1 asked why the council was not proposing to increase council tax by the full 2.99%
- 1 suggested looking elsewhere for funding
- 1 requested a full audit of adult social care
- 1 felt that the proposed ASC precept increase seems high but did not have enough information
- 1 requested a council tax discount for part-time students
- 1 requested the additional income be spent on keeping the central library at Crown Street

Comments Relating to the Consultation

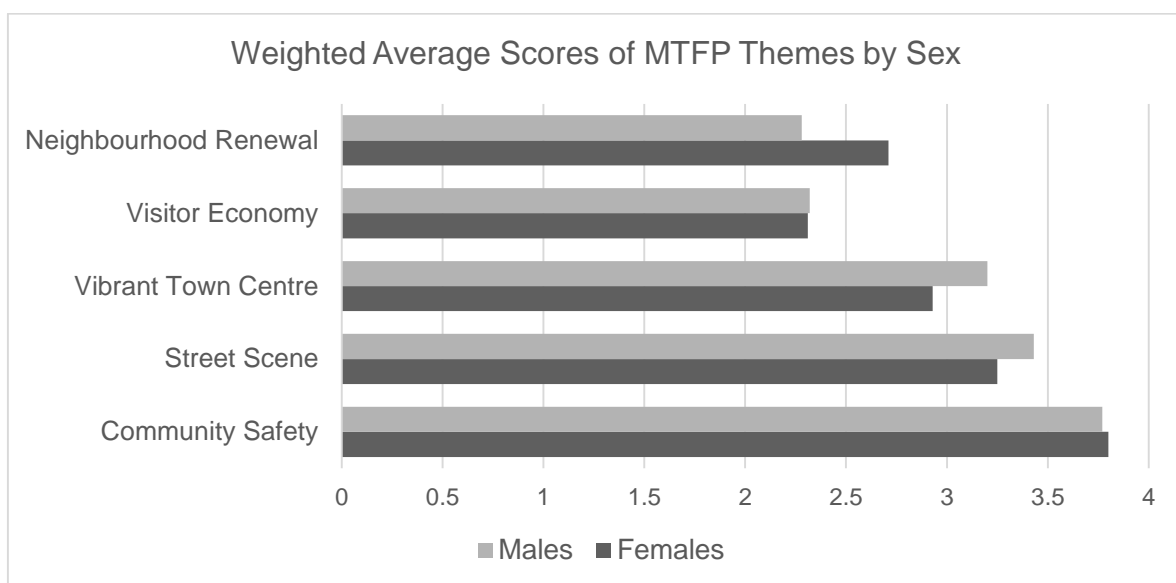
21 comments were received relating to the consultation itself, and included arguments that the consultation should have allowed for residents to select priority areas within

each of the themes or suggest additional themes, that the proposed themes were not easily comparable, that it was not a real consultation, that more information was required and/or that the council needed to make sure the feedback was considered.

Breakdown by Protected Characteristics / Location

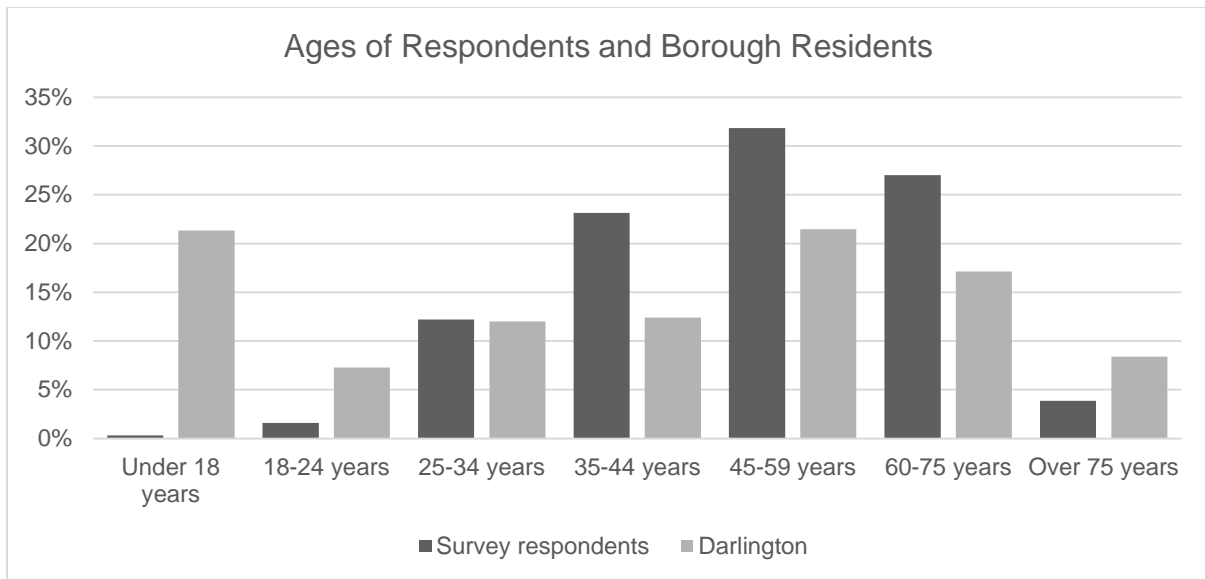
Sex

Of the survey respondents who declared their sex, 173 (56%) were women and 137 (44%) were men. This means that females may be slightly overrepresented in the survey analysis, as they account for 51% of the borough's population. Filtering responses by sex shows that males were more likely to identify the Town Centre and Street Scene services as funding priorities, whereas females were more likely to consider Neighbourhood Renewal and Community Safety as key areas where funding should be directed.

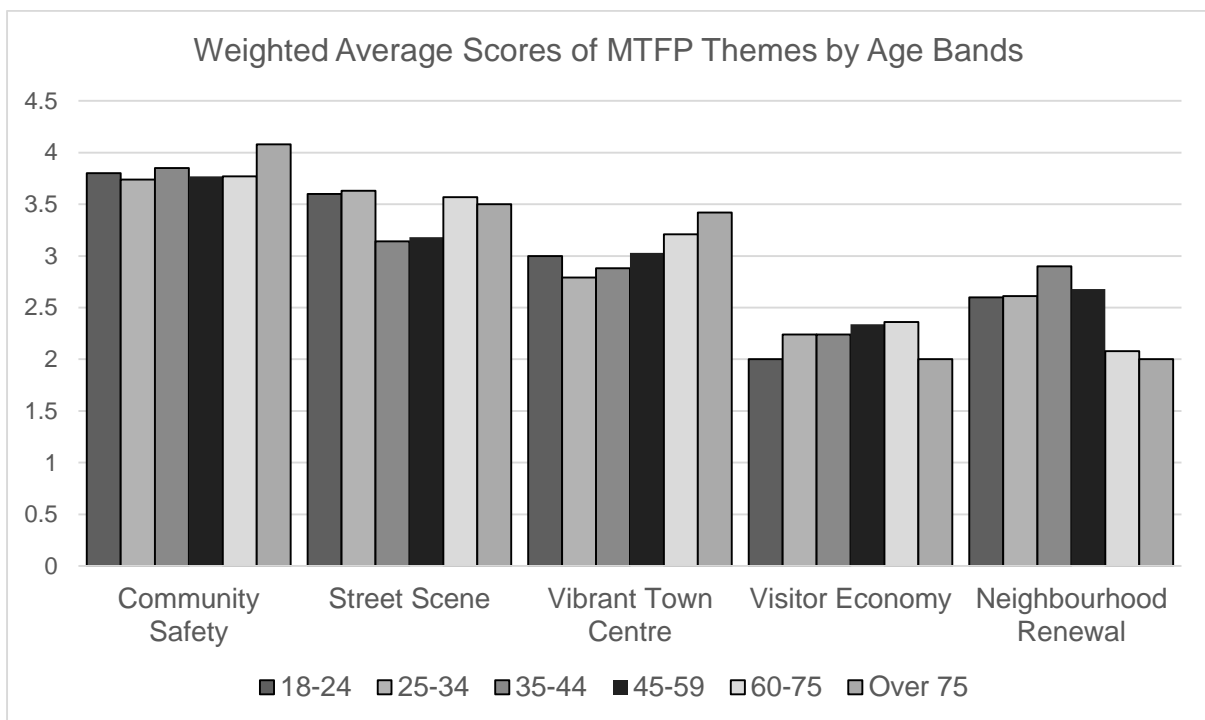


Age

The proportion of survey respondents reporting their age as under 24 or over 75 was very low in comparison to the proportion of the borough's population that is made up by these age bands.

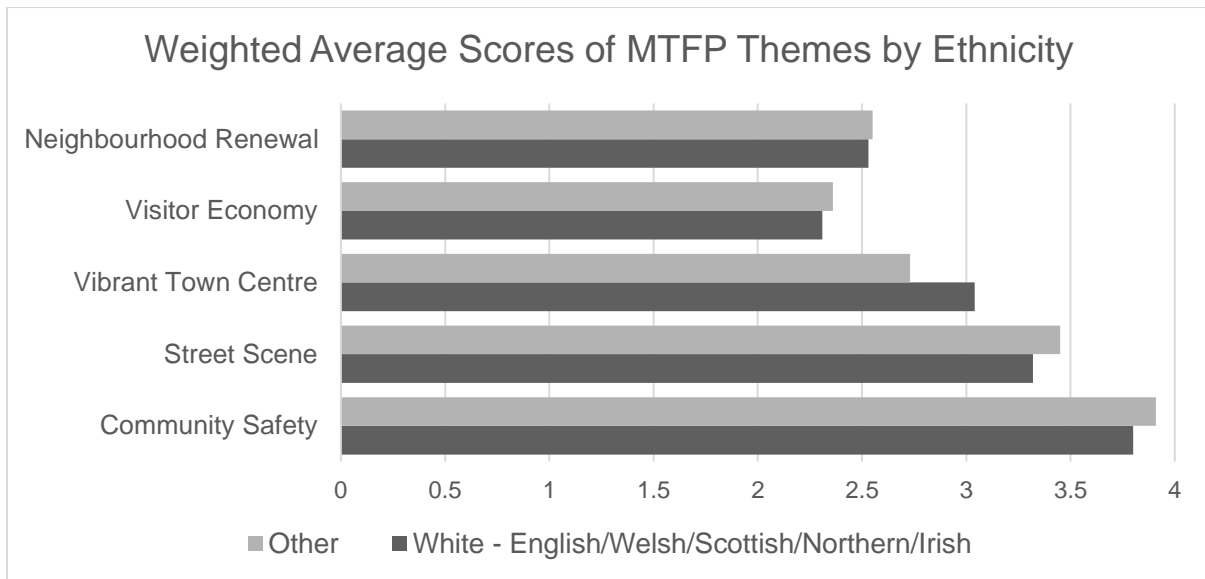


In terms of age of respondents, there appears to be a slight positive correlation between the age of respondents and how highly they prioritised the Visitor Economy for funding. Otherwise, over 60s were less likely to prioritise Neighbourhood Renewal, and over 75s were slightly more likely to prioritise Community Safety.



Ethnicity

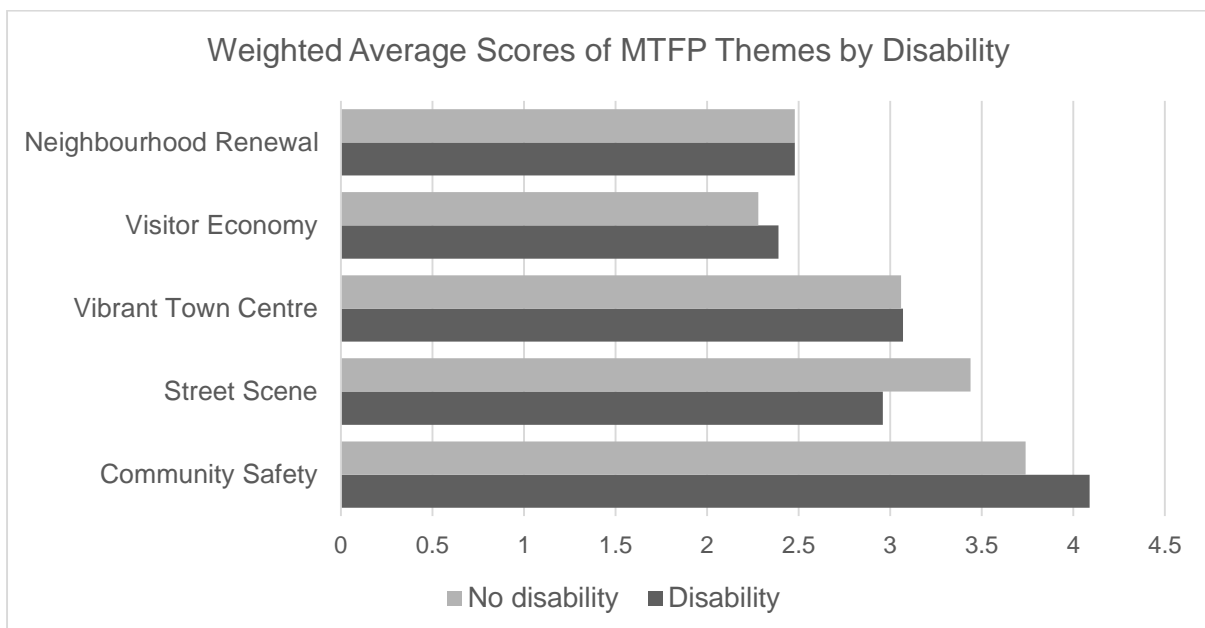
In terms of ethnicity, 281 (96%) of the 294 respondents who indicated their ethnic background identified themselves as 'White – English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern/Irish', which is not out of line with the borough average. The below graph therefore shows the weighted average of this group, compared to the weighted averages of respondents who identified as any other ethnic group, including 'White – Other' etc.



The graph shows that respondents identifying as ‘White – English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern / Irish’ were significantly more likely to identify the Town Centre as a priority funding area, and slightly less likely to prioritise all the remaining themes, particularly Community Safety and Street Scene.

Disability

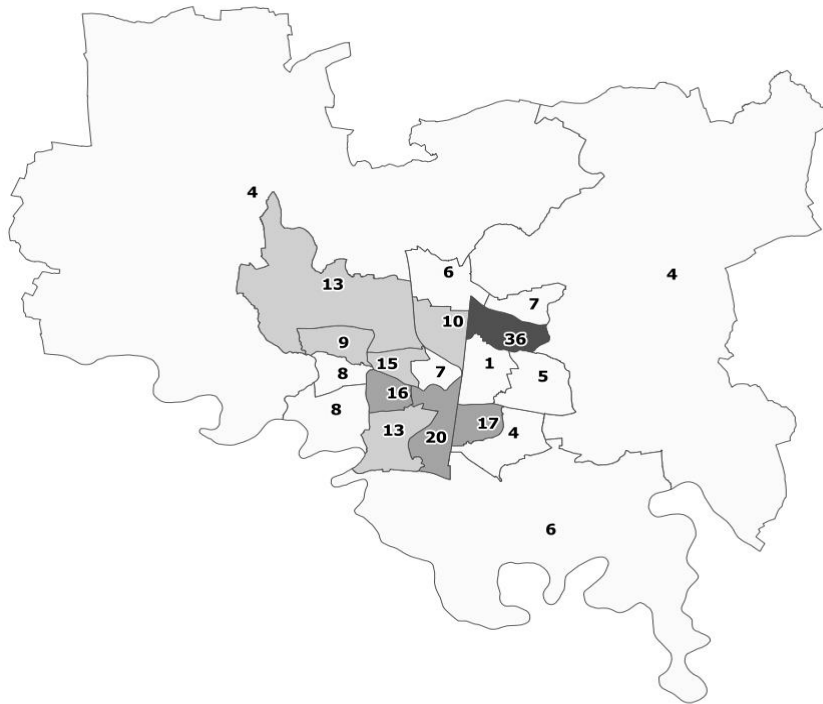
54 of the 304 respondents (18%) who responded to this question reported that they had a disability, which is not out of line for the borough’s population.



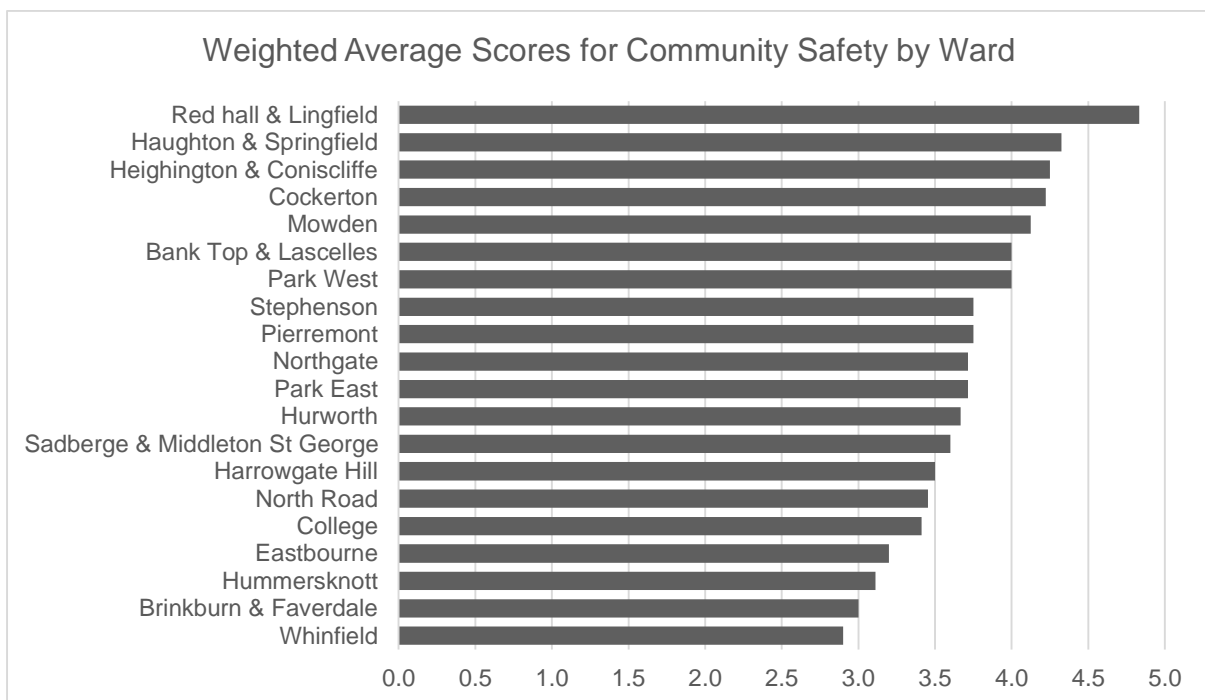
Filtering these responses shows that people with a disability were more likely to identify the Visitor Economy and, particularly, Community Safety as funding priorities, whereas respondents without a disability were more likely to consider Street Scene as a key area where funding should be directed.

Ward

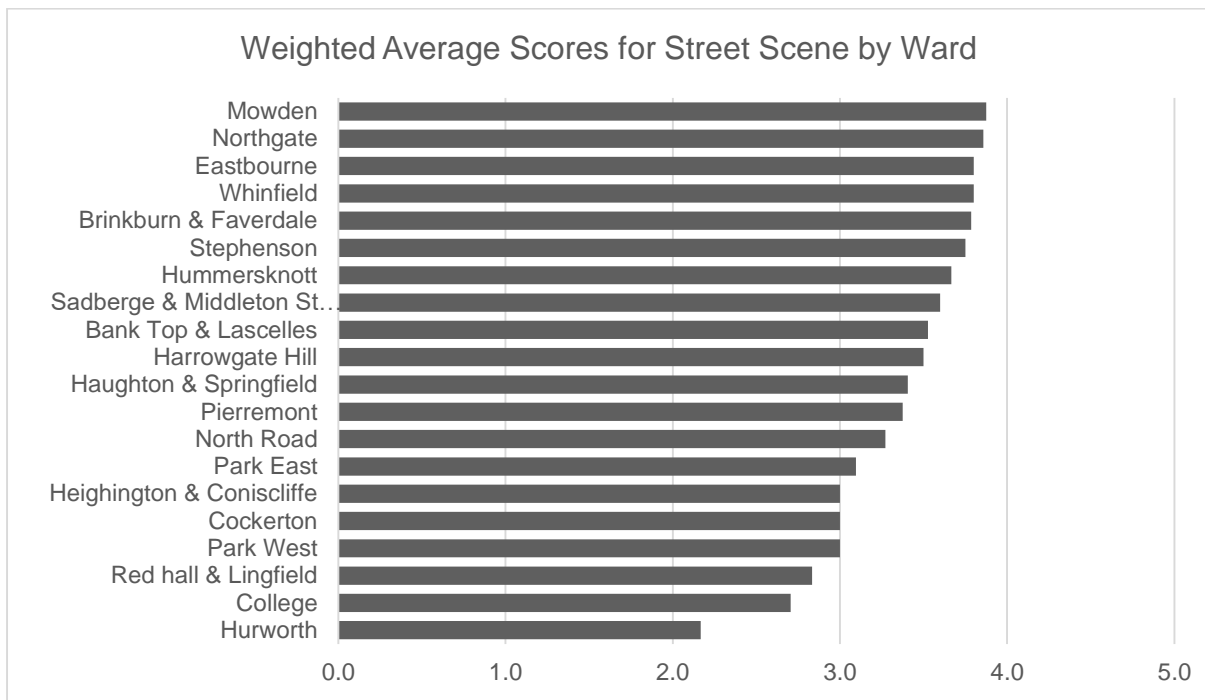
The map below shows the number of responses received where the respondent gave their post code, by ward.



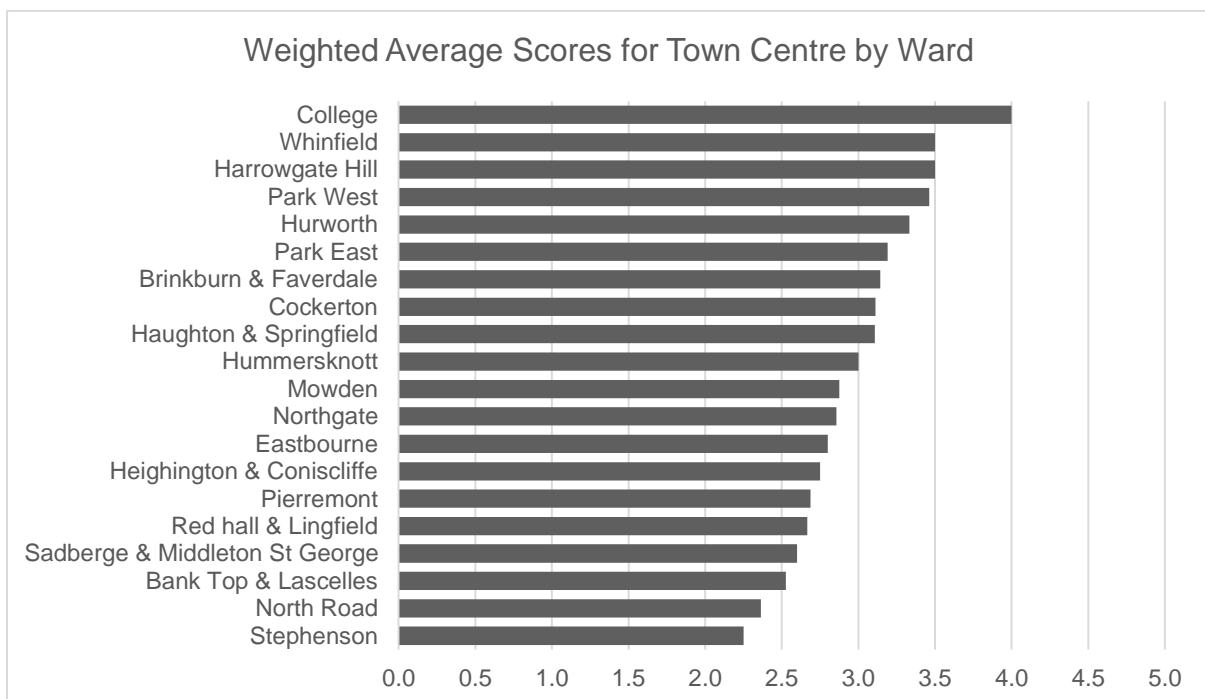
The following graphs show each theme by the weighted average score of respondents from each ward, ranked from most to least popular.



Respondents from Red Hall and Lingfield were significantly more likely to prioritise Community Safety. Conversely, respondents from Whinfield, Brinkburn and Faverdale and Hummersknott were more likely to rank this theme as their third most important.

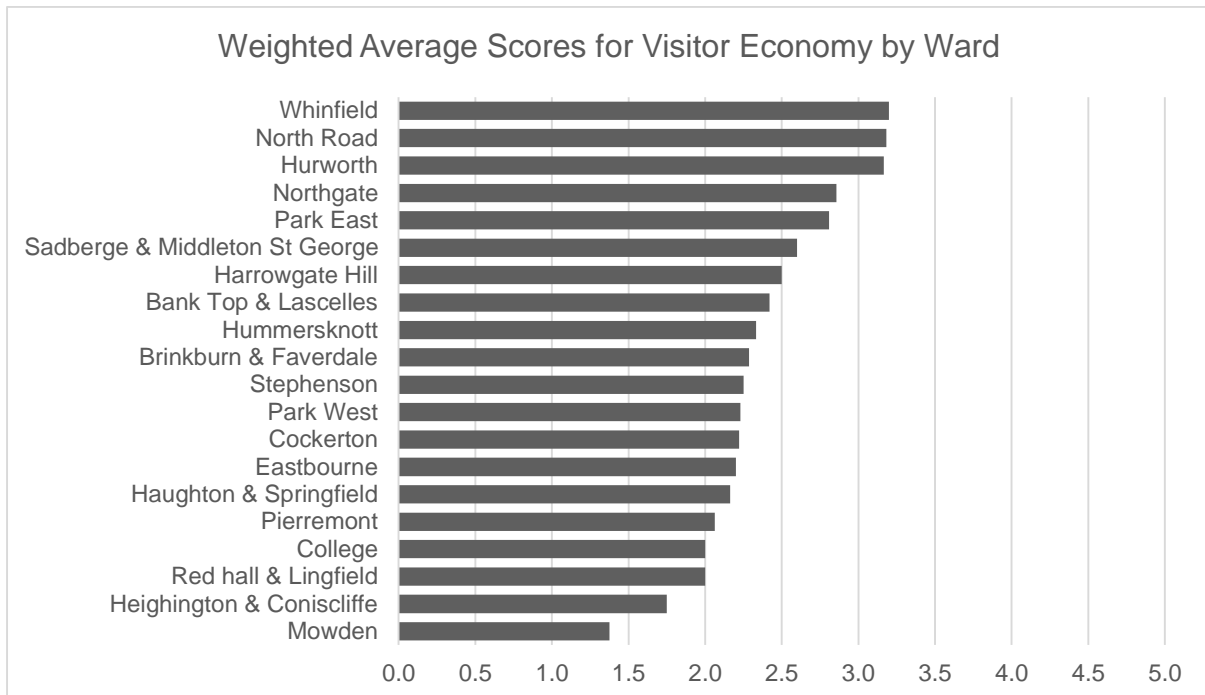


Respondents from Mowden and Northgate were most likely to prioritise Street Scene for funding. Hurworth residents were least likely to rank this theme highly.

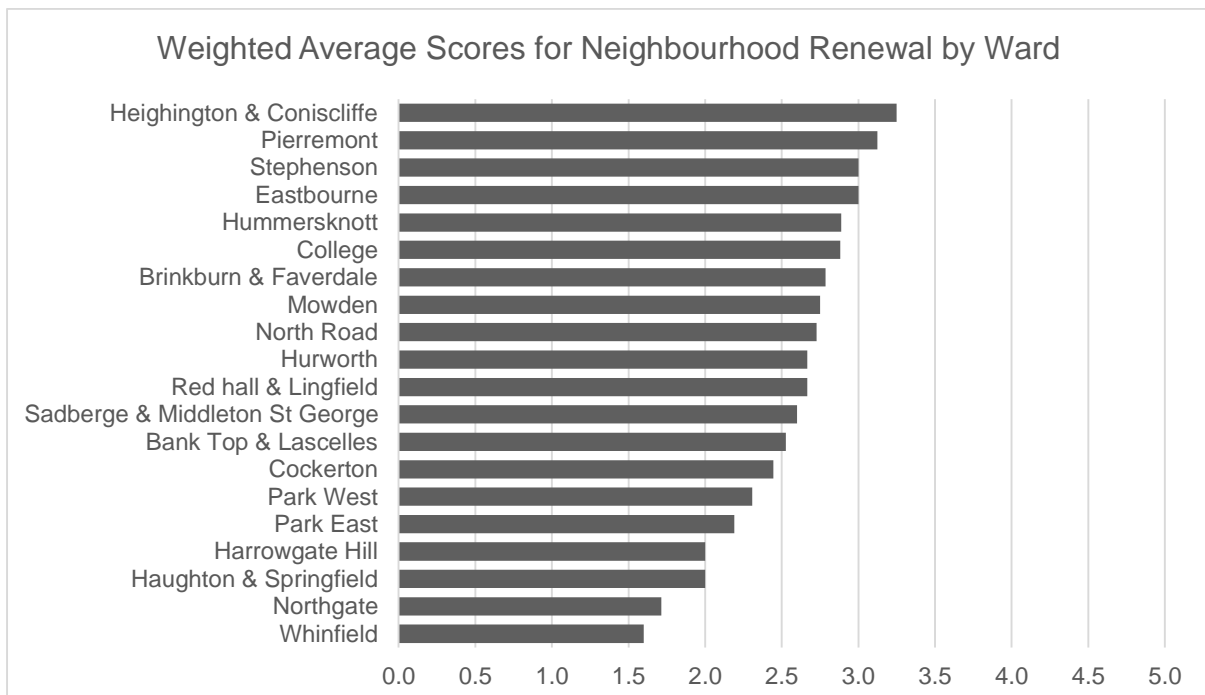


College ward residents were significantly more likely than elsewhere to rank the Town Centre as their first or second most important theme, likely due to their geographical

proximity. At the opposite end of the scale, respondents from Stephenson and North Road wards were least likely to consider the Town Centre as a funding priority.



Whinfield, North Road and Hurworth gave the Visitor Economy the top weighted average scores. Respondents from Mowden and Heighington and Coniscliffe were least likely to rank this theme highly.



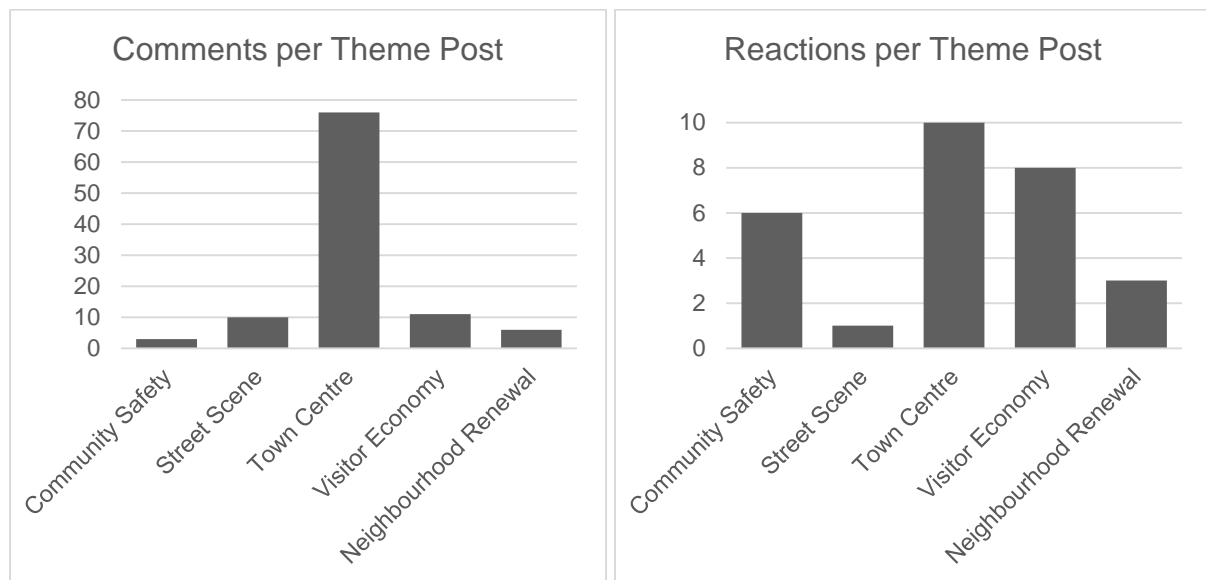
Finally, in terms of Neighbourhood Renewal, Heighington and Coniscliffe and Pierremont residents, on average, ranked this theme as one of their top 3. In contrast,

residents of the Northgate and Whinfield wards were most likely to rank this priority as one of their bottom two.

Facebook

Residents were encouraged to give their views on Facebook via a series of daily posts relating to each of the proposed themes.

The graphs below indicate the number of reactions (likes, haha faces etc.) and comments received for each theme post.



These findings seem to counteract the findings of the consultation survey, namely that residents feel that Community Safety should be prioritised for funding, followed by Street Scene, the Town Centre, Neighbourhood Renewal and the Visitor Economy, respectively. The reason for these differences is largely explained by the questions asked – whilst in the survey itself, respondents were asked to indicate which theme(s) should be prioritised, on Facebook they were asked to give their views on each, which largely turned out to be suggestions. A higher number of likes and comments therefore does not necessarily correspond to how important people felt it is relative to the other themes, but rather how many suggestions (in the majority of cases) they have to spend money on within that particular theme.

A breakdown of comments received on Facebook by theme is given below:

Community Safety

Of the 3 comments received regarding the Community Safety theme:

- All 3 agreed that Community Safety should be a priority area for funding.
- 1 also related to the Street Scene theme

Street Scene

Of the 10 comments received regarding the Street Scene theme:

- All 10 agreed that Street Scene should be a priority area for funding.
- 1 included a suggestion as to what spending on Street Scene should focus on

- 1 requested the library be kept in its current location.

Town Centre

Of the 76 comments received regarding the Town Centre theme:

- 26 agreed that the Town Centre should be a priority for funding
- 1 did NOT think the Town Centre should be a priority
- 49 were not clear about whether they thought the Town Centre should be a funding priority
- 2 urged the council to consider the comments received
- 7 related to the Community Safety theme
- 3 related to the Street Scene theme
- 3 comments requested the Central Library remain at its current location
- 117 suggestions were made as to what spending on this theme should focus on

Visitor Economy

Of the 11 comments received regarding the Visitor Economy theme:

- 6 thought the Visitor Economy should be a priority for funding
- 2 did NOT think the Visitor Economy should be a priority
- 3 were not clear about whether they thought the Visitor Economy should be a priority
- 5 were suggestions as to what spending on this theme should focus on
- 1 related to the Town Centre theme

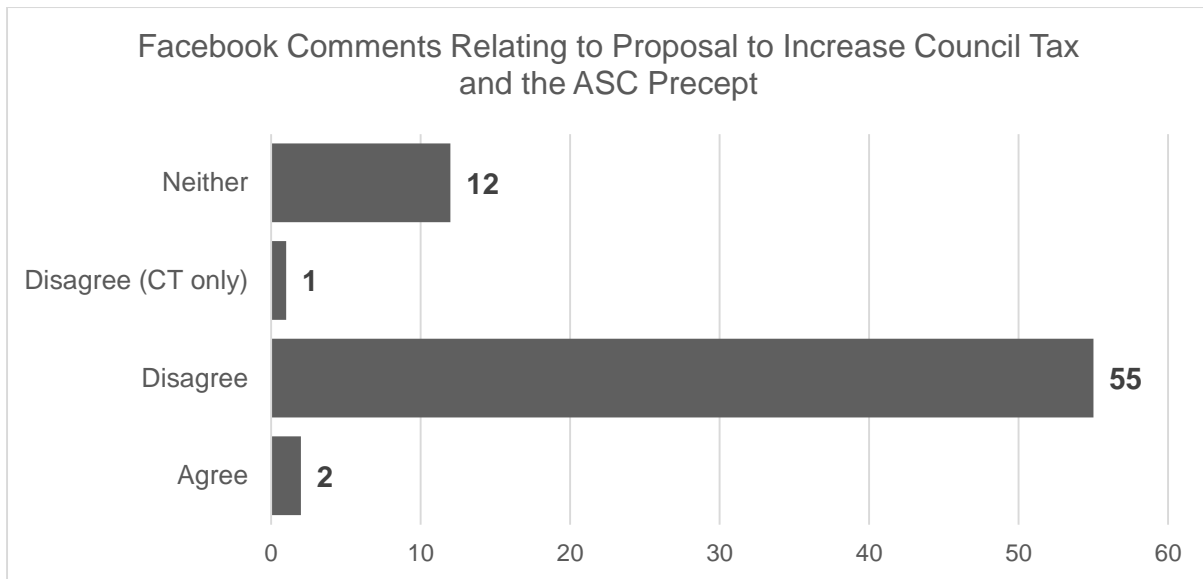
Neighbourhood Renewal

Of the 6 comments received regarding the Neighbourhood Renewal theme:

- 1 thought the Neighbourhood Renewal theme should be a priority for funding
- 5 were not clear about whether they thought Neighbourhood Renewal should be a priority
- 5 related to the Town Centre theme

Council Tax/ ASC Precept proposals

The Facebook post relating to the proposal to increase council tax and the ASC precept attracted 70 comments from 65 respondents, and 60 reactions.



In contrast to the feedback received via the survey, where the majority of respondents expressing a clear opinion were in favour of this proposal, the majority of respondents expressed disagreement on Facebook. Of the 55 comments received where respondents clearly indicated they were against the proposal:

- 12 expressed concern about residents’ ability to pay
- 8 criticised current council spending
- 6 did not feel they see any benefits from paying increased council tax and/or ASC precept
- 4 objected to paying more for council services they perceive as deteriorating
- 2 suggested the council find the money elsewhere.

Other Responses

In addition to the online survey and council Facebook page, a small number of additional responses were received separately.

Darlington for Culture (DfC)

DfC’s response to the consultation consisted of a some suggestions for the Visitor Economy and Town Centre themes:

1. Visitor Economy
A provision of £5,000 per year to Creative Darlington as a commissioning budget to enable its manager to commission events within Darlington’s Arts programme which might not meet the criteria of DfC’s Small Grants Scheme.
2. Town Centre
A further provision of £5,000 per year in match funding in support of Darlington Arts Festival. For this year a bid for £4,000 has been made to the County Durham Community Foundation (CDCF) and DfC has allocated a further £1,000. The funding is primarily required to better promote the Festival to attract visitors from further afield.

DfC's response also included an offer to work with the council to retain Central Library at Crown Street and ensure the future of Cockerton Library, and suggested some of the additional funding could be used to support this.

Leggs Fashion Limited

A letter was received from John Coxon, the Director of Leggs Fashion in response to the consultation. The letter outlines a number of reasons why the Town Centre should be prioritised and gives some suggestions for how funding could be spent:

1. A memorable theme of event –bigger than Festival of Ingenuity lasting longer than a week
2. Reduced rents and rates
3. More carpark signage and lower costs

County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust (CDDFT)

A letter from Sue Jacques, chief executive of CDDFT, was received in response to the consultation. The letter identified areas of priority the Trust wished to highlight under the Neighbourhood Renewal theme as follows:

1. Ongoing support and commitment to the Healthy New Towns activity and associated initiatives, specifically the digital agenda including extending funding to retain the InHealthCare platform and emerging integrated self-management opportunities
2. Supporting the Better Care Fund priorities, specifically supported discharge
3. Additional social care provision to enable 7 day response compliance

The Council Tenants' Customer Panel and Scrutiny Panel

The joint panel's response identified Community Safety and Street Scene as the two key themes they would prioritise for funding. In terms of the former, they felt enforcement and education should be invested in. With regards to Street Scene, they felt litter (particularly in the town centre) and dog fouling were the key issues to be tackled.

Emails

A number of emails were received from local residents and stakeholders during the course of the consultation:

Priority Themes

Community Safety

- 1 gave suggestions as to what funding under this theme should focus on

Street Scene

- 1 requested that Street Scene be prioritised for funding

Town Centre

- 4 gave suggestions as to what funding under this theme should focus on

Visitor Economy

- 1 gave suggestions as to what funding under this theme should focus on
- 1 requested that funding NOT be prioritised for the Visitor Economy

Council tax / ASC Precept Increase

- 1 raised concern about the respondent's ability to pay the proposed increases

Other

- 1 requested that the number of councillors be cut to save costs
- 1 requested that the central library be retained at Crown Street
- 1 requested that road repairs be included as an additional funding priority
- 1 identified support for local businesses as an additional area they would like to see funding prioritised, and outlined a number of suggestions relating to this priority.